

## Press Review 6 /2013 - Vietnam, Water and Sustainability Research,

For more information please contact: Ms. Pham Thi Viet Ha ([phamthivietha@vd-office.net](mailto:phamthivietha@vd-office.net) or [hapham2310@gmail.com](mailto:hapham2310@gmail.com))

Notice for new Office address: Room 409, 4<sup>th</sup> floor – 34T Building, Hoang Dao Thuy street, Cau Giay District, Hanoi - Tel/Fax: + 84 4 626 888 08

No	Title	Date	Source	Region	Catalogue	Description
1	Taps open on waste water treatment plant	1/6/2013	VN News	Binh Duong	Waste water	A waste water treatment plant with a treatment capacity of 17,650 cubic metres per day opened yesterday in the southern province of Binh Duong.
2	VN to get \$250m development funds	3/6/2013	VN News	Vietnam	Other	The World Bank has approved financing from the International Development Association (IDA) worth US\$250 million for Viet Nam to support a health system improvement project and research, science and technology innovation.
3	Heat waves toast north and centre	4/6/2013	VN Net bridge	Quang Nam	Environment	As a scorching heat wave dries up reservoirs, farmers can do nothing but wait, said Nguyen Thi Nam Linh, a farmer in Quang Nam Province's Dien Ban District.
4	Land-use rights processing to be sped up, fees rationalised	4/6/2013	VN News	HCM	Land use	Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Nguyen Minh Quang has instructed localities to keep land-use fees as low as possible and speed up the processing of land-use rights certificate.
5	Illegal sand mining erodes river banks	5/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Tay Nguyen	Environment	Illegal sand mining has caused severe erosion along the two main tributaries of the Serepok River in the Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands), affecting the lives of many people.
6	Khanh Hoa unable to treat toxic waste	6/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Khanh Hoa	Waste treatment	The only healthcare waste treatment station in the central province of Khanh Hoa has not been functional for the past 10 months, making it difficult for hospitals to get rid of their toxic waste.



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7	Trade villages threaten the environment	8/6/2013	VN News	Hanoi	Pollution	The city needs a total of VND1.35 trillion (US\$64.3 million) to deal with environmental pollution in surrounding trade villages from now to 2030, according to the municipal Department of Industry and Trade.
8	Cham islanders get access to clean water	11/6/2013	VN News	Quang Nam	Water	Inhabitants of Cham island, 18km off the coast of Hoi An, now have access to fresh water for the first time.
9	Provinces formulate environmental plan	11/6/2013		HCM	Environment	Provinces in the Mekong Delta are taking steps to address urgent environmental issues by developing urban zoning plans and improving human resource training.
10	Savvy spending key to climate fight	12/6/2013		Vietnam	Climate Change	Viet Nam was yesterday urged to improve its management of financial support from international organizations to effectively deal with the impacts of climate change.
11	Environmental impact studies lacking impartial approach	13/6/2013		Vietnam	Environment	Deputy Director of the Viet Nam Environment Administration Le Ke Son spoke to Cong An Nhan Dan (People's Police) newspaper about environmental impact assessments for hydro-power plants.
12	Dam collapse under inspection	14/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Gia Lai	Water	Water absorption may have weakened the 40 metre length of dam wall that collapsed in the Central Highlands province of Gia Lai.



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13	Dong Van park boasts geological marvels	15/6/2013	VN News	Ha Giang	Environment	Scientists and culture managers discussed a master plan for Dong Van Geopark at a workshop in Quan Ba District yesterday.
14	Clouds cover VN weather forecasting	17/6/2013	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Viet Nam has so far only accomplished 30 per cent of the workload to modernise weather forecasting technology and upgrade monitoring systems.
15	Dong Nai to pull rug on polluting projects	17/6/2013	VN News	Dong Nai	Pollution	Many firms in southern Dong Nai Province found to be releasing toxic waste into the environment will have their permits withdrawn by the end of the year.
16	Target on ODA disbursement 'is within reach'	19/6/2013	VN News	Vietnam	Others	Viet Nam is on track to fulfil its target of attracting US\$32-34 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and preferential loans during the 2011-15 period, along with capital disbursement of \$14-16 billion.
17	Ca Mau sinking with water table	19/6/2013	VN News	Ca Mau	Water	Southernmost Ca Mau Province is in danger of sinking below sea level in the next few decades due to over-exploitation of underground water if something isn't done urgently.
18	City wants toxic industrial park moved	20/6/2013	VN News	HCM	Waste	HCM City authorities have asked neighbouring Dong Nai Province to relocate the Bien Hoa Industrial Park No 1 to better protect the water resources of HCM City's nearly 10 million residents.
19	Delta drought, seawater ruin 6,000ha of rice	20/6/2013	VN News	Can Tho	Environment	Drought and seawater intrusion have destroyed nearly 6,000ha of summer-autumn rice in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta.



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20	East Sea Conduct key to 'regional stability'	20/6/2013	VN News	Vietnam	Water	To establish and enhance regional trust and co-operation as well as ensuring a peaceful and stable East Sea.
21	Rising sea levels put Delta at risk	21/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Mekong	Environment	The Mekong Delta, the country's biggest agricultural hub, might experience a sea level rise of 30cm sooner rather than expected - as early as 2040.
22	Paddies, houses submerged by flood	24/6/2013	VN News	Hanoi	Environment	Coastal provinces from Quang Ninh to Khanh Hoa have been bracing over the weekend for storm Bebinca, the second tropical storm of the year.
23	Beleaguered Delta farmers sell off land	25/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Mekong	Land use	many farmers in the Mekong Delta are forced to give up farming and sell their lands, causing concern among local authorities.
24	Floods remain a threat after Typhoon Bebinca	25/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Vietnam	Environment	People in northern and central provinces have been warned to be vigilant for flash floods and landslides following heavy rain brought by Typhoon Bebinca.
25	Brick kilns continue to pollute Ha Noi	26/6/2013	VN News	Hanoi	Pollution	More than 30 brick kilns in Ha Noi's Chuong My District keep operating, polluting the environment and impacting human health and production.
26	Green projects vital for economy	26/6/2013	VN News	Hanoi	Environment	Financial institutions, banks and financial firms have been urged to support the nation's green growth strategy by providing capital to green projects.



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27	Hanoi steps up flood prevention efforts	27/6/2013	VN News	Hanoi	Environment	Hanoi is installing street drainage systems in 20 new flood areas which appeared when tropical storm Bebinca dropped 96mm of rain at the weekend.
28	Hydro-power projects dead in the water	28/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Vietnam	Water	As many as 338 hydro-power projects, which theoretically could generate a combined capacity of over 1,000MW of electricity, would be put off.
29	Rural families 'left to suffer'	28/6/2013	VN Net Bridge	Vietnam	Environment	Rural households across the country that have suffered from shocks such as natural disasters and outbreaks of disease haven't received all the support they deserve.



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## 1. Taps open on waste water treatment plant



*The waste water treatment plant that opened yesterday in Binh Duong Province. With a treatment capacity of 17,650 cubic metres per day, the plant will collect and treat waste water for the 13,000 residents of Thu Dau Mot and improve the environment of southern Binh Duong Province.*

A waste water treatment plant with a treatment capacity of 17,650 cubic metres per day opened yesterday in the southern province of Binh Duong.

The plant, the first of its kind in the province, is financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The Binh Duong Water Supply Sewerage Environment Co Ltd (BIWASE) is in charge of its operation.

The first phase of the project was funded with a loan of JPY7.77 billion (US\$77 million) from JICA.

JICA will also loan JPY19.961 billion (\$197.95 million) for the second phase, in which a sewer network in Thu Dau Mot City will be expanded and a waste water treatment plant will be built in Thuan An Town in the province.

Thu Dau Mot City in southern Binh Duong Province has a high economic growth rate.

Most household and industrial waste water in the province is discharged directly into the environment without first being treated properly.

The plant is expected to help protect the Sai Gon and Dong Nai rivers, which provide HCM City with most of its water.

## 2. VN to get \$250m development funds

The World Bank has approved financing from the International Development Association (IDA) worth US\$250 million for Viet Nam to support a health system improvement project and research, science and technology innovation.

The difference between IDA and other sources of financing is that IDA has a component of grant and loan, and it targets the very poor and women and children.

Of the total, \$150 million would go to the NORRED Project, which aimed to provide better health services for 15 million people, especially children and women, and by increasing the efficiency and equity in the use of hospital services in 13 provinces of the Northeast and Red River Delta regions, the World Bank said in a press release.

The project would help strengthen the capacity of provincial and district hospitals to deliver better quality hospital services as an alternative to patients seeking care in Ha Noi, and it would reduce financial barriers, especially by supporting the expansion of the national health insurance system to include households above the poverty line.

The FIRST Project, which received funding of \$100 million, would support science, technology and innovation in Viet Nam by designing and piloting science, technology and innovation policies, enhancing the effectiveness of research and development (R&D) institutions, and encouraging the development of innovative technology enterprises.

The project's main beneficiaries were R&D institutions and innovative technology enterprises that invested in R&D. Spin-offs and start-up enterprises that were incubated from R&D institutions or universities would also benefit.

The project would also support the establishment of a public-private partnership research laboratory in the R&D zone of the Hoa Lac High-Tech Park in Ha Noi, the bank said.

### **3. Heatwaves toast north and centre**

*As a scorching heat wave dries up reservoirs, farmers can do nothing but wait, said Nguyen Thi Nam Linh, a farmer in Quang Nam Province's Dien Ban District.*

Like many rice fields in this central province, Linh's faced a critical shortage of water.

Vo Dinh Nen, director of Quang Nam Province's Water Works Company, said 50 out of 74 reservoirs had dried up. The rest retained only enough water "for 50 per cent of rice fields."

According to the company, more than 5,000 hectares of rice fields belonging to over 5,000 households risked being abandoned due to the lack of water.

Thousands of hectares of rice fields in the provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue are also suffering from drought.

Bui Minh Tang, director of the National Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting, said the northern and central areas would experience three such heat waves this month.

Rain is expected to ravage northern provinces, with rainfall being 30 per cent higher than the same period in other years. However, little rain is forecast in central provinces, causing a severe lack of water for both agricultural production and domestic use.

River flow in central provinces is 66 per cent lower than in previous years. Many reservoirs in central provinces have dried up, such as Hoi Son and Van Hoi in Binh Dinh Province, Suoi Trau and Suoi Hanh of Khanh Hoa Province and Song Trau and Du Du of Binh Thuan Province, where the current water volume is equivalent to only 10 per cent of storage capacity.

Nguyen Trong Phu, deputy director of Binh Dinh Province's Water Works Company, said this year's lack of water for agricultural irrigation was more severe than other years. Most springs, lakes and rivers did not contain a single drop of water.

About 15 reservoirs managed by the company are currently storing more than 234 million cubic metres, equivalent to half their storage capacity, he said. If the water in all the reservoirs were mobilised for agricultural production, nearly 5,000 hectares of rice fields in Tay Son, Phu Cat, Phu My, Vinh Thanh and Hoai An districts would still lack water.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development proposed that the Prime Minister support Central and Mekong Delta provinces with VND295 billion (US\$14 million) to dredge the canals, set up pumping stations and take preventive measures against drought.

Local agriculture and rural development departments asked farmers to switch from rice to corn or soybeans, which require less water. Tang said that although the drought would continue until next month, Central Highlands provinces had fortunately escaped the worst of it. Rainfall this month was 50 per cent higher than the previous months, he said, and a lack of water for agricultural production and domestic use in Central Highlands areas had partially been dealt with.

#### **4. Land-use rights processing to be sped up, fees rationalised**

Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Nguyen Minh Quang has instructed localities to keep land-use fees as low as possible and speed up the processing of land-use rights certificate.

Speaking on the VTV programme "People ask, Minister answers" on Sunday, Quang said many people in HCM City had turned down certificates (also known as the "red book") because of high land-use fees.

Following Decree 93 of the Ministry of Finance, the People's Committee of each locality was allowed to decide on land-use fees for people who applied for certificates of land-use rights.

Recently, many people in HCM City complained that fees were too high, forcing them to avoid getting the certificates, Quang said.

Localities should adopt the finance ministry's regulation flexibly, he said.

Regarding people's concerns over the policy to allow people to owe land-use fees, Quang said Government Decree 120 regulated that accumulated land-use fee debts would be payable after five years at the rate set at the time of granting land-use rights certificates.

From the sixth year any unpaid fee would be calculated at the new rate, the minister said.

Local authorities were responsible for informing residents of the policy.

Relating to the granting of land-use rights certificates, Quang said authorities of 22 provinces and cities who were behind in the process would have to speed up the task.

It was essential to publicise results of certificate applications during the first half of the year and those localities that had yet to complete the task should do it before the end of the second six months.

The Government last year earmarked around VND1 trillion (US\$47 million) to help speed up the process of issuing land-use rights certificates for 42 localities.

The ministry has proposed the Government and the National Assembly allocate money to support the issuance of certificates this year, particularly in midland and mountainous areas.

## **5. Illegal sand mining erodes river banks**

*Illegal sand mining has caused severe erosion along the two main tributaries of the Serepok River in the Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands), affecting the lives of many people.*

Ho Van Khoi, who lives near the Krong Ana River in Dak Lak Province's Krong Bong District, said most of his family's three hectares of farmland has been eroded by the river in the last three years.

In Khoi's Cu Kty Commune the river has swallowed up around 80ha of farmland since 2005, according to local authorities.

Several sections of banks in the province's Cu Kuin District have also been badly eroded.

Nguyen Xuan Quang of the Hoa Hiep Commune Land Survey – Construction Division, said companies are only allowed to mine sand from the river bed and not the banks, but many illegally mine banks.

Nguyen Van Thiem, head of the Dak Lak Province Natural Resource Management Department, said it is difficult to eradicate illegal sand mining in the Krong Ana River.

When department inspectors visit, all illegal sand mining boats halt their activities because they get information about the inspection before they arrive, he said.

They resume when the inspectors go away, he said.

If boats are caught red-handed while mining illegally, they flee to the middle of the river, where only the waterway police have authority, he said.

The other river that has become wider and deeper because of illegal sand mining is the Krong No in Dak Nong Province.

The section running through Krong No District's Buon Choa Commune used to be just 20 metres wide a decade ago, but has now widened to 100 metres.

Chu Van Khoa, chairman of the commune People's Committee, said hundreds of farming families live along the Krong No.

"In the past 10 years the erosion of the river banks has caused hundreds of hectares of land to fall into the river," he said.

More than 30 sand-mining boats operate in this section of the river, taking a total of 1,800cu.m of sand every day, he added.

## **6. Khanh Hoa unable to treat toxic waste**

*The only healthcare waste treatment station in the central province of Khanh Hoa's Nha Trang City has not been functional for the past 10 months, making it difficult for hospitals to get rid of their toxic waste.*

HCM City to treat all solid, liquid wastes

Located in the Khanh Hoa Hospital of Dermatology and Venerology, the station has been responsible for treating all the waste from hospitals and clinics in the city since it opened in 2001.

Director of the province's Department of Health Bui Xuan Minh said that the station was built with old technology and frequently overloaded, causing regular breakdowns.

While the station's capacity is 400kg of waste per day, it was forced to treat about 600kg.

"The station was repaired many times, but it cannot be improved as it is always overloaded," said Minh.

Since the station failed completely last August, hospitals in the city have experimented with different ways to treat their waste.

Khanh Hoa General Hospital administers autoclave technology at high temperatures, treating 10kg of waste in 10 minutes. The waste is then buried or burnt in a rubbish dump north of Nha Trang City.

With about 50 patients at a time, Khanh Hoa Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases Hospital ends up with 2kg of waste each day – mainly bottles containing patients' sputum.

The institution dug a deep hole in the ground and now burns the waste with alcohol or petrol.

"None of these methods ensures healthcare hygiene. They will seriously pollute the environment and affect neighbouring residents' health," said Minh.

The provincial People's Committee has approved a plan to build a healthcare waste treatment station in the Ru Ri rubbish dump in the city's Vinh Luong District.

Construction work on the station is expected to begin next week and will be completed by the end of this year.

The station will have the capacity of 250kg per hour. Equipment was imported from Belgium with total funds of US\$1 million.

## 7. Trade villages threaten the environment



*Rubbish from trade villages is dumped without being treated into a pond in Ha Noi's Chuong My District. The living environment around the capital's trade villages is threatened by water, air and land pollution.*

The city needs a total of VND1.35 trillion (US\$64.3 million) to deal with environmental pollution in surrounding trade villages from now to 2030, according to the municipal Department of Industry and Trade.

According to the department, the living environment in the city's trade villages is seriously threatened by water, air, noise and land pollution.

As many as 37 per cent of villagers suffer from eye and digestive diseases, while 20 per cent and 31 per cent have respiratory and skin diseases.

Specifically, from now to 2020, the city will have to spend VND750 billion (\$35.7 million) on building pollution treatment systems in 50 major trade villages, while VND600 billion (\$28.6 million) is needed to build such systems in other 30 trade villages in the 2021-30 period.

Together with environmental pollution treatment, capital city authorities will increase campaigns to encourage businesses and households in the villages to follow regulations on environmental protection and hygiene.

They will also make policies to support businesses in promoting scientific and technological co-operation with foreign organisations to apply advanced pollution treatment technologies in the villages.

The city plans to move establishments that seriously pollute the environment from residential areas.

Local authorities have implemented many measures to deal with pollution, including helping householders tackle sewage problems, saving fuel, reducing noise, as well as increasing awareness of environmental protection.

## 8. Cham islanders get access to clean water

Inhabitants of Cham island, 18km off the coast of Hoi An, now have access to fresh water for the first time.

"In the dry season, it took us hours to wait for water from wells because of high demand," recalled Truong Thanh Phuong, a resident of the island. "Now, we can access a different water source."

The new reservoir also benefits visitors to the island – one of the major tourist destinations in the central province of Quang Nam.

Vice chairman of the Hoi An People's Committee Nguyen Van Dung said the 80,000-cubic-metre reservoir would supply enough fresh water for the nearly 3,000 people who live on Cham island and the surrounding eight islets.

"Islanders get water from springs, rain and digging wells during the wet season between September and April. But the island has limited clean water in the dry season," Dung said.

"Wells are either dry or salinated, so their water can only be used for cleaning."

The reservoir cost VND162 billion (US\$7.7 million) from the State budget and took six years to build.

Local authorities also piloted a solar-powered seawater filter system which, if successful, would provide more freshwater to people on the island and islets.

Vice chairman of the city Truong Van Bay said that environmentally friendly technology solutions such as wind power and solar energy were the area's top priority.

Cham island was recognised as a world biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 2009. It hosts around 100,000 tourists annually, of which 10 per cent are foreigners.

## 9. Provinces formulate environmental plan

Provinces in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta are taking steps to address urgent environmental issues by developing urban zoning plans and improving human resource training.

Upgrading of technical infrastructure, especially of forecasting and inspection equipment, is another top priority, the Southwestern Department for Environmental Protection has said.

Water pollution in the delta, as well as a general degradation of the environment, is occurring at an alarming rate, according to a survey conducted by the Water Resources University.

The survey said that e.coli bacteria in rivers and canals in the region had exceeded the permitted level.

To enhance cooperation among localities, Delta officials also plan to organise more forums on environmental protection.

In addition, local water-supply and drainage systems will be upgraded in an effort to prevent flooding in urban areas.

New waste collection and treatment facilities will be built, and environmental inspection will be strengthened in localities, industrial parks and manufacturing and trading establishments.

To help companies pay for upgrading waste water treatment systems in industrial parks, local authorities have issued policies to offer them financial support.

Every year, about 3.7 million tonnes of solid waste in the region, mostly untreated, is released in rivers and canals.

Industry emissions and activities in the delta have also contributed to higher levels of pollution, including noise pollution.

Suspended solids and ammonia nitrogen (NH<sub>3</sub>-N), as well as ammoniac and coliform content in rivers and canals in the provinces of An Giang, Vinh Long, Long An, Hau Giang and Ca Mau and Can Tho City are all higher than the permitted levels.

The concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and carbon monoxide (CO) in the air in the region's urban areas is also higher than standard levels, according to the Water Resources University's survey.

## 10. Savvy spending key to climate fight

Viet Nam was yesterday urged to improve its management of financial support from international organizations to effectively deal with the impacts of climate change.

Le Van Minh, deputy head of the Support Programme to Respond to Climate Change, said at a Ha Noi conference that developed countries have reiterated their commitment to long-term climate finance support to developing nations, with a view to mobilising US\$100 billion per year for adaptation and mitigation by 2020 under the recent UN Climate Change Conference in Doha. "This is a huge amount of financial support that Viet Nam should take advantage of," he said.

The country should strive to gain access to the variety of supports earmarked for coping with climate change, including the Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund, he said.

If we fail to gain financial support from developed countries and funds, we will meet many difficulties fighting the potentially devastating impacts of climate change, he said. "To avoid that, an expert team skilled in negotiating and obtaining financial support packages from international organisations must be set up," he said.

Managing and using climate funds effectively are also a key factor in successfully overcoming climate change challenges, said experts.

Statistics from the Ministry of Planning and Investment show roughly \$1.2 billion was mobilised from international donors under the official development assistance (ODA) model to help Viet Nam combat climate change during 2009-11. The fund was double the amount expected under the Supporting Programme to Respond to Climate Change.

However, the ministry has so far failed to produce a detailed report outlining how the financial support was spent.

Nguyen Tuan Anh, deputy head of the ministry's Science, Education, Natural Resources and Environment Department said a lack of detailed information had prevented the release of a comprehensive analysis.

"The data is scattered across both central and local level agencies, so it really takes time to collect and process," he said.

We have worked with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme to ensure the detailed report be finished by the end of this year, he said.

Experts from OXFAM and CARE, recommended that Viet Nam ensures a fair, transparent and robust accounting system for climate finance from both domestic and international sources.

The monitoring and evaluating of climate-related projects should be undertaken by the State Auditors, they said.

The Government should make disclosures of information on climate-related finance, its implementation and results mandatory, they added. According to the Asian Development Bank, estimates of climate change's potential impact on Viet Nam's GDP ranged from 1 to 3 per cent per year by 2050.

The country, which has two major low-lying deltas and a long coastline, is vulnerable to a range of climate-related hazards. In 2008 the Government approved the National Target Programme to Respond to Climate Change, worth VND1.9 trillion (\$94 million) for the 2009-15 period.

## 11. Environmental impact studies lacking impartial approach

Deputy Director of the Viet Nam Environment Administration Le Ke Son spoke to Cong An Nhan Dan (People's Police) newspaper about environmental impact assessments for hydro-power plants.

Under the current system, local authorities are delegated the function of evaluating environmental impact assessment (EIA) reports for small-and-medium sized hydro-projects. Many experts have pointed out that this has led to the unjust approval of too many projects, leading to extreme environmental repercussions. How do you justify this?

At present, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment is responsible for evaluating the EIA of big hydro power projects - those with a capacity of over 60MW and projects which might possibly affect national parks and reserves.

The local authorities, therefore, are in charge of evaluating the EIA for the smaller projects.

I have to admit that at local level, the authorities approve projects too easily. This is because of the limited capacity of their human resources. Meanwhile, evaluating EIA is in essence a difficult field which requires a high level of expertise.

EIAs are viewed as an important tool to hold investors accountable, but post-evaluation investigations have shown that at least 10 per cent of EIA reports are not eligible. What are the common problems with them?

It is true that an EIA is an important tool for investors to fulfill their environmental responsibilities and for managerial authorities to minimise errors.

However, many EIA reports were not completed properly. For example, the investors of some hydro-power projects only reported that the area needed to build a reservoir while failing to mention that other roads and buildings also required building. This in turn resulted in an incomplete report.

In addition, because project development inevitably means cutting down some forest trees, there is a principle that the investors have to grow an equivalent number of trees elsewhere. However, the local authorities could not allocate land for this.

Finally, many of the reports should have been written from a wider perspective. For example, if you develop a hydro-power plant in the upstream of a river, you must take into consideration the impact on other plants that already exist downstream. Too many EIAs have failed to do this.

There is a view that EIAs are a scientific tool and should be kept that way. We should not transform them into another administrative procedure which may cause unnecessary red tape for investors.

Some people suggest that investors only need to do a preliminary EIA when submitting their proposal. If they get the approval then they will be requested to submit a comprehensive EIA. What do you think about this approach?

This is a common practice internationally and it is in fact a good approach. There are many cases when investors have to spend a lot in conducting pre-feasibility studies. It will be worth the investment if they receive the green light, but what if they get a no? This would be a waste of time and money. That is why a preliminary EIA should be undertaken for projects that are deemed to see high risk, and if their proposal is approved then they can proceed with a more detailed evaluation.

There was a boom in hydro-power development in the past, triggered by the growing demand for electricity. At present, the amount of electricity generated is quite big and we have nearly tapped into the full hydro-power capacity of the rivers. In your view, do you think it is necessary to develop new hydro-power plants?

Many countries in the world stop developing hydro-power electricity because of the negative social and environmental impacts associated with them. I still support hydro-power, but I think the environmental impacts should be taken into careful consideration ahead of economic gains.

The Dong Nai 6 and 6A hydro-power projects have been in the spotlight for a while because local authorities oppose their development while the investor is determined to proceed. What is your opinion?

As of now, the investor is still in the process of finishing the EIA to submit to the ministry. The ministry has not evaluated it yet. The investors have to clarify information relating to the potential damage to the forests, how the plants would disrupt the flow of the river and their impact on the nearby Cat Tien National Park. The final call will be made by the National Assembly.

## 12. Dam collapse under inspection

*Water absorption may have weakened the 40 metre length of dam wall that collapsed in the Central Highlands province of Gia Lai on Monday, announced Minister of Construction Trinh Dinh Dung.*

Hydro-power dam broken in Central Highlands

He said yesterday (June 13) that the absorption may have caused the creation of hard and soft sections in the earthen retaining wall of the newly built Ia Krel 2 dam.

However, Dung said he was waiting for official results of an inspection being conducted by the State Department for Construction Quality Assessment.

Dung also claimed it was the responsibility of the provincial department of Industry and Trade to appraise the quality of the dam from design through to construction.

The torrent of water that followed the collapse of the wall swept away 10 residents and forced 20 families from their homes. However, to date, there have been no reports of death or injury.

Yesterday, families from the 20 households in Duc Co District were moved into temporary accommodation. Vo Thanh Hung, chairman of the district's people's committee, said local authorities were helping affected residents get back on their feet by giving them up to VND3 million.

However, he said no one from the hydro-electricity company had arrived to discuss matters by yesterday morning.

No injuries were reported. However, 200ha of rubber trees were swept away, causing losses of hundreds of billions dong.

Rescue teams are still looking for possible victims. When the dam broke, 10 residents were swept away by the torrent, but were later found safe. The 5 Megawatt Ia Krel 2 project was built in 2009 by the Bao Long-Gia Lai Hydro-electricity-Industry Company. It had been expected to come into operation in the third quarter of this year.

### **13. Dong Van park boasts geological marvels**

Scientists and culture managers discussed a master plan for Dong Van Geopark at a workshop in Quan Ba District yesterday.

Announced in April, the plan will divide the park into three preservation zones, focused on Geology Science, Geology-Culture and Ecology, and four tourism centres.

The park will also promote the cultural values of 17 ethnic groups and handicraft villages in four districts (Dong Van, Quan Ba, Yen Minh and Meo Vac).

By 2020, provincial officials hope, tourism income will account for 65 per cent of the local economic structure.

Nguyen Manh Thang, deputy secretary general of the Viet Nam National Commission for UNESCO, said the site could help preserve regional specialties like tea, honey and herbs and festivities like the Khau Vai Love Market and rain wishing festival, along with other unique customs of the local Tay, Dao, Pa Then and Mong.

Trieu Tai Vinh, the provincial Party Secretary, agreed. He confirmed that the province was home to the largest number of the Mong ethnic people in the country.

"The group has rich cultural features, so it has great potential for cultural tourism development," he said, "However, to develop in a sustainable way, it's necessary to figure out a more detailed plan. In the next few months, the province will welcome investors."

The Dong Van plateau was recognised by UNESCO in 2010 as one of 77 geological parks in the world and the second geological park in Southeast Asia.

The geopark will cover an area of more than 2,300sq.km spanning the four districts. The area is home to over 250,000 people from 17 ethnic groups, of which the Mong make up 70 per cent of the population. Up to 80 per cent of the plateau is covered by limestone.

The number of tourists visiting Ha Giang has increased considerably from 300,000 in 2010 to 400,000 in the last year. Since the beginning of this year, the province has received more than 140,000 tourists.

## 14. Clouds cover VN weather forecasting

*Viet Nam has so far only accomplished 30 per cent of the workload to modernise weather forecasting technology and upgrade monitoring systems.*



*A technician collects data to serve weather forecasting activities in the National Centre for Hydro-meteorological Forecasting. The quality of the forecasting services has been poor due to lack of investment in weather forecasting infrastructure.*

The shortage of capital available due to the current economic difficulties mainly accounted for the slow progress, according to Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Nguyen Minh Quang.

The minister was answering inquiries from National Assembly deputies whose concerns about the quality of the forecasting services were prompted by the inaccuracy in weather forecasting and storm tracking last year.

As set in the three-year programme that was supposed to finish last year, about VND1.4 trillion (US\$67.4 million) should have been spent by now to invest in upgrading, expanding and automating the monitoring system; and building data transmission and analysis capacity as well as adding computer power to support day-to-day operations.

However, there was little money coming in and it was uncertain when it would actually come against this gloomy economic outlook, according to deputy director-general of the National Hydro-meteorological Centre, Pham Van Duc.

He said part of the plan was to install automated sensors at 127 weather stations in the north, however, there had been little progress, so basic weather data collection was being conducted manually.

"Of course, this will affect the quality of forecasting," Duc said.

In the central and southern part of the country, automatic weather stations have already supplanted traditional ones in separate ODA-funded projects.

Other incomplete components of the programme include installing weather radars, setting up a national hydro-meteorological information system and building a headquarters to co-ordinate and monitor hydro-meteorological services.

Duc, whose agency was responsible for implementing this programme, said that his agency was still writing proposals to get these components into motion.

However, he admitted that due to the nature of those projects, it was harder to get finance compared to other basic infrastructure projects.

"It's because the return on investment is harder to measure. For hydro-meteorological projects, buying new devices or building new construction projects is just one aspect, but you need to invest in operational capacity if you want to see the whole system work," he said.

Funding for this programme came mainly from Government bonds and the State budget.

The programme is part of a series of efforts that aim to bring the national forecasting capacity to a level close to that of developed countries in Asia by 2020.

The total money going into the weather forecasting services in Viet Nam per year is about VND500 billion (\$24 million), while in developed countries such as South Korea or Japan, it reaches \$450 million.

## 15. Dong Nai to pull rug on polluting projects



*A corner of the waste water treatment plant at the Bien Hoa 2 Industrial Park, Dong Nai Province. Authorities will withdraw licences of firms that are slow to set up waste treatment facilities.*

Many firms in southern Dong Nai Province found to be releasing toxic waste into the environment will have their permits withdrawn by the end of the year.

The order was issued by the director of the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Le Viet Hung, as the amount of harmful waste is reported to be rising steadily.

He said many businesses were also too slow to set up waste treatment facilities.

According to a recent department report, every day the province produces more than 120 tonnes of harmful waste, but only about 100 tonnes is collected for treatment.

Some waste collecting agencies are reported to sell recyclable waste and then discharge the remaining in deserted areas, including the roadsides, seriously polluting the environment.

Recently, the department inspected a daily waste and industrial solid-waste zone in Bau Can Commune, Long Thanh District. It showed that construction covered only 3ha out of the 90ha allotted. About 150ha of waste is dumped and burnt in the area each day, producing acrid pollution that upsets residents.

Project owner, Nguyen Quoc Trinh, director of the Phuc Thien Long Commercial Services Co Ltd, said that construction had started two years ago and was expected to be completed by the end of 2015.

Each day, the zone plans to treat 450 tonnes of daily waste, 160 tonnes of industrial waste and 100 tonnes of harmful industrial waste. However, Trinh said the US\$30 million project had met difficulties in mobilising funds and was temporarily forced to stop work.

Trinh proposed the province allow such enterprises to borrow money at preferential interest rates.

Hung said the province had closed temporary rubbish dumps in areas used to build waste-treatment zones.

As many as 13 out of 28 dumps were closed.

## **16. Target on ODA disbursement 'is within reach'**

Viet Nam is on track to fulfil its target of attracting US\$32-34 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and preferential loans during the 2011-15 period, along with capital disbursement of \$14-16 billion.

The statement was made by Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Cao Viet Sinh, who added, "Viet Nam has disbursed more than \$7.8 billion during the past two years."

"This year the country targets to disburse about \$4.5 billion, raising the total amount of ODA disbursement during 2011-13 to \$12.3 billion," he noted.

"It means that the country needs to disburse between \$1.6-3.6 billion in the next two years to fulfil the target," he pointed out.

During the past 20 years, donors' ODA commitments to Viet Nam reached about \$76.2 billion, while total ODA disbursement during the period was estimated at \$36 billion, according to the General Statistics Office.

This year, foreign donors pledged \$6.45 billion in ODA for Viet Nam.

The European Union and its Member States alone have pledged \$965 million in ODA for Viet Nam this year, said Franz Jessen, head of the Delegation of the European Union to Viet Nam at a press briefing in Ha Noi yesterday, June 18.

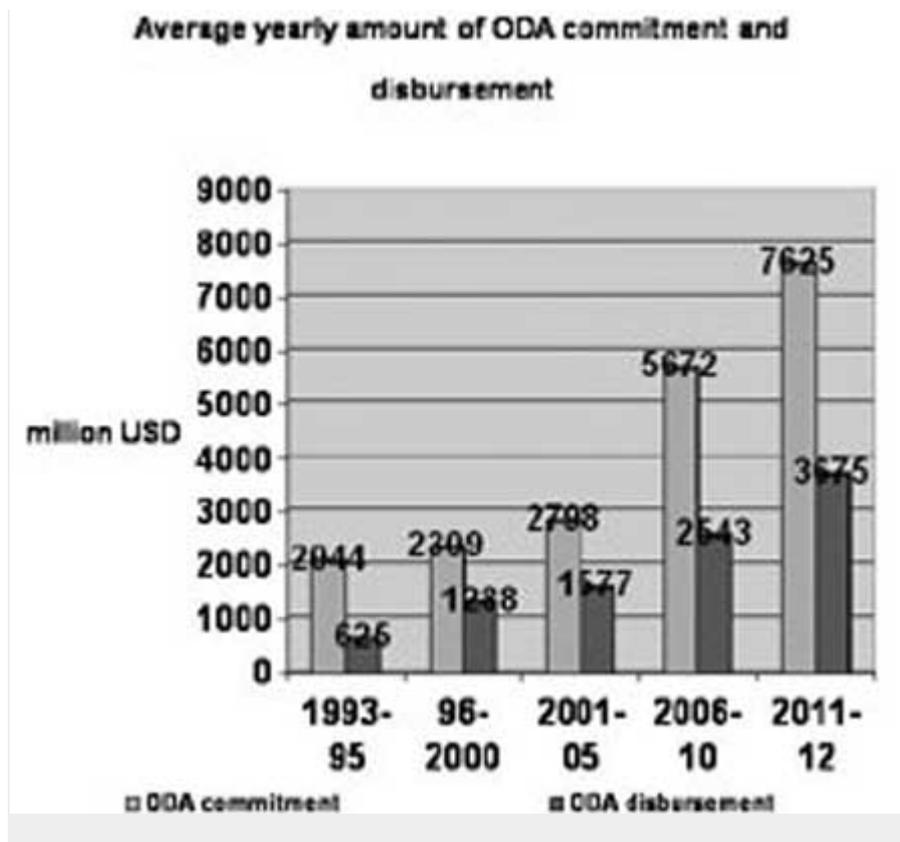
The EU had allocated development assistance to sectors where Viet Nam is seeking progressive reforms to maximise synergies between Government policies and development assistance programmes, said Jessen.

"Bilateral assistance allocated to Viet Nam will trigger and drive policy reform in a wide range of sectors such as the rule of law, public finance management and the health sector," he said.

To ensure the ODA target is within reach, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in April asked for comprehensive measures to attract, manage and use ODA more efficiently.

The PM asked relevant ministries, sectors and localities to co-operate with the National Steering Committee for ODA and Preferential Loans to review and assess the implementation of ODA-funded projects and programmes and have measures to promptly tackle difficulties for projects with sluggish disbursement.

However, Deputy Minister Sinh admitted that challenges remained for Viet Nam in ODA disbursement, including difficulties relating to ODA-related mechanisms and policies, differences in procedures between Viet Nam and donors, the lack of corresponding capital and land clearance for ODA projects.



Asian Development Bank (ADB) Country Director for Viet Nam Tomoyuki Kimura said that since 1993, the ADB had approved over 100 loan-funded projects, half of which have been completed. A post-project evaluation suggested that with a 90 per cent success rate, most ADB projects have been successful.

However, the ADB director said many of these projects faced significant implementation delays.

"This means the intended benefits of the projects are delivered to beneficiaries much later than originally hoped. Also the actual costs of projects increase due to inflation, and in an effort to fit the project activities within the original budget, many projects are downsized in scope," he said.

"Start-up delays and mechanism for project approval remain key issues."

In addition, Viet Nam is expected to face more challenges as it is now a middle-income country, which means that attracting high levels of ODA will become increasingly difficult.

Sinh said some donors had changed their official development co-operation models with Viet Nam to focus more on co-operation between partners while some donors may stop providing ODA for Viet Nam in the coming years.

"That requires the country to have appropriate measures to attract and improve the efficient use of this capital source to meet investment development and ensure ability to pay foreign debts," he said.

ADB country director Kimura said the type of ODA projects, as well as availability of the funds in Viet Nam, are quickly changing.

"Concessional assistance is becoming increasingly scarce and Viet Nam will eventually have to graduate from it. Therefore, it is essential for Viet Nam to make sure that limited ODA funds are allocated where most value can be added and utilised efficiently," Kimura said.

To ensure efficient use of ODA, Sinh said the ministry had worked with relevant ministries, agencies and donors to carry out a number of measures, including finalising ODA management mechanisms and policies and increasing guidance and support for project owners to deal with difficulties.

Work has also been carried out to review and assess the implementation of ODA projects to ensure timely measures to tackle the shortcomings of troublesome projects, Sinh said.

As a donor, ADB urged the Government to better ensure project readiness and make sure that projects in the pipeline are only approved once they have achieved a high degree of total project readiness, said Kimura.

"Key to this is professional capacities of Project Management Units (PMUs), where key staff including project directors, chief accountants and procurement officers should be members of permanent units that provide staff with attractive career paths and monetary and non-monetary incentives to perform well," he said.

## 17. Ca Mau sinking with water table

Southernmost Ca Mau Province is in danger of sinking below sea level in the next few decades due to over-exploitation of underground water if something isn't done urgently.

Experts released the warning at a conference held with the co-operation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute (NGI) in Mekong Delta Can Tho City on Monday.

Kjell Karlsrud, PhD, from the Norwegian institute said nearby provinces in the Mekong Delta also faced a risk of subsidence.

Seeking other clean water sources to replace the use of underground water was highly recommended, he stressed.

Filtering water from canals to serve daily lives of local residents was believed to be the best choice, however, it was costly, he said.

The local authority was advised to stop all use of underground water and to instead build water filter companies and sea dykes.

Nguyen Truong Tien, a member of the Viet Nam Society of Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering, said the province should apply advanced technologies to recycling water and storing rainwater to reduce the use of underground water.

The NGI said Ca Mau province's land surface is only 1m higher than the sea level.

The warning came after research on land subsidence in the province was conducted by the NGI from May 2012, at the request of the Vietnamese Agriculture Ministry and Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

It showed coastal erosion has been gauged at between 100m and 0.4km over the past 20 years in Ca Mau.

The province, covering an area of 4,350sq km, has a subsidence rate of 1.9-2.8cm per year, according to Viet Nam Institute of Geosciences and Mineral Resources head Tran Tan Van.

By initial calculations, the land surface of several local areas had subsided about 30-70cm over the last two decades.

Excessive exploitation of underground water from surrounding drill wells was blamed for the problem.

Van said about 370,000cu m of underground water was taken daily from 100,000 drilled wells in the province.

The drilled wells were only located in some urban areas, which had suffered a higher subsidence rate than others, Tan said.

## 18. City wants toxic industrial park moved

HCM City authorities have asked neighbouring Dong Nai Province to relocate the Bien Hoa Industrial Park No 1 to better protect the water resources of HCM City's nearly 10 million residents.

"Pollution in the Dong Nai River has been increasing, and could exceed the capacity of water treatment plants," the chairman of HCM City People's Committee, Le Hoang Quan, said in a letter sent to the provincial authority of Dong Nai.

"Waste water from Bien Hoa IP No 1 is one of the major sources of waste causing pollution in Dong Nai River," said the letter, as quoted by the Sai Gon Tiep Thi (Sai Gon Marketing) newspaper.

According to the HCM City People's Committee, Dong Nai River is expected by 2025 to supply 2.5 million cubic metres of the estimated 3.7 million cu. m of water to the city per day.

Established in 1963, the plant supplies water to 20 million people in the Dong Nai River basin, including almost 10 million residents of HCM City, according to the document quoted in the newspaper.

After 50 years of operation, Bien Hoa IP No. 1 has significantly contributed to industrial production and development in Dong Nai Province.

However, it has caused serious pollution, especially to the Dong Nai River, the major source of clean water for HCM City and the provinces of Dong Nai and Binh Duong, according to Tran Van Tu, head of a group of National Assembly deputies from Dong Nai Province.

Bien Hoa IP No 1 discharges over 8 million cu. m of waste water per day, but only 1.2 million cu. m. is collected and treated.

The remaining 7 million cu. m of waste water, as a result, is poured into Dong Nai River every day, said Tu.

"Relocation of polluting plants (in the industrial park) is a necessary and urgent task," he added.

Members of the National Assembly from Dong Nai Province have asked the NA Science-Technology-Environment Committee to conduct a study on the best way to relocate the oldest industrial park in southern Viet Nam.

Tu said the biggest obstacle for relocation was the inability of the province to provide preferential tax rates for companies that must be relocated.

To resolve the problem, the Dong Nai People's Committee asked the Dong Nai Industrial Park Development Corporation (Sonadezi), the investor of Bien Hoa IP No 1, to map out a plan and submit it to the Government and National Assembly for approval.

Do Thi Thu Hang, chairwoman of Sonadezi, said her company had developed a plan that has been approved by the provincial authority.

Businesses in the IP will enjoy a four-year tax exemption, plus a 50 per cent tax reduction for nine years after they relocate, said Hang.

## 19. Delta drought, seawater ruin 6,000ha of rice

Drought and seawater intrusion have destroyed nearly 6,000ha of summer-autumn rice in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta.

In Soc Trang, the worst hit province, more than 5,600ha were lost, according to the Southern Irrigation Science Research Institute.

The winter-spring crop a few months ago was similarly affected, with drought and saline water destroying 5,300ha in the country's rice granary.

Speaking at a seminar held in Can Tho City on Monday, Tang Duc Thang, the institute's head, said seawater has entered deep into the delta since January.

"In some rivers, saline water has entered more than 60km from the mouth."

This year it has occurred a month earlier than usual and severely hit coastal provinces like Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, and Soc Trang.

At the seminar, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development said authorities in the delta have to take active steps to check the seawater intrusion and safeguard freshwater sources.

It also asked them to upgrade irrigation works and regularly update forecasts about water availability.

The delta provinces have to ensure that the area they have under rice is appropriate for existing conditions, it said.

Participants told the meeting that the southern region faced a severe water shortage in the dry season that just ended.

The water level in the Mekong's upstream is now 10-40 per cent lower than normal, they said.

Quach Van Nam, director of Soc Trang' Province's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, said the region needs more money to upgrade irrigation canals to fight drought and seawater intrusion during the summer-autumn and autumn-winter crops.

The provinces also need money for forecasting water availability to effectively regulate irrigation systems, he said.

Thang listed the things that need to be done in future to fight drought and seawater intrusion — building the Cai Lon and Cai Be sluice gates to preserve freshwater in coastal areas, setting up electric pumping stations in the delta, and building sluice gates at river mouths where the salt content of water reaches four grammes per litre. The Government has approved a grant of VND282 billion (US\$13.4 million) for the delta and south-central regions to buy seeds and fight drought and the intrusion of saline water.

The delta is expected to plant 700,000ha of rice for the autumn-winter crop between now and August.

## 20. East Sea Conduct key to 'regional stability'

*To establish and enhance regional trust and co-operation as well as ensuring a peaceful and stable East Sea, Viet Nam is keen to encourage closer links during the search and rescue of stricken vessels in the sea.*

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Quang Vinh stated this yesterday, June 20, when opening a two-day conference on providing a joined up approach during search and rescue operations which saw around 40 senior government officials and academics from ASEAN countries and China attending.

Vinh highlighted the importance of the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the East Sea (DOC) to maintain peace and stability in the region, saying that ASEAN and China had encountered many difficulties and challenges on the road to reaching the DOC in 2002.

ASEAN also adopted the Declaration of the Six-point Principles on the East Sea, and all the countries involved were expecting both parties to start official negotiations soon and move towards a Code of Conduct in the East Sea (COC).

The DOC, therefore, was a landmark agreement between ASEAN and China, demonstrating their joint respect for international law, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the principles stated in the DOC.

The deputy minister stressed that adhering to the DOC and the COC would ensure peace, security, safety and the free movement of shipping, which is essential when building trust in line with the spirit and language of the DOC.

The East Sea region still experiences many complicated scenarios that put many lives at risk, and numerous factors can endanger fishing boats and shipping in general.

For humanitarian and trust building purposes, ASEAN and China needed to discuss and find suitable joint procedures when conducting search and rescue operations.

In 2010 when Viet Nam took over the ASEAN Chair, it proposed an initiative in this field that was applauded by other ASEAN countries. ASEAN's foreign ministers agreed to pass a declaration on cooperation during the Search and Rescue of Persons and Vessels in distress at sea.

The conference was to enable the participants to establish trust by stepping up cooperation during search and rescue operations, which will help to consolidate peace, stability and security in the East Sea. It is especially relevant as several disputes over sovereignty in the East Sea have still not been settled.

It will also study factors that could influence future joint humanitarian programmes in the region and propose specific measures to promote closer links.

The conference is just one of several moves being taken by ASEAN and China to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East Sea (DOC), which was approved by senior ASEAN and Chinese officials after meeting in Beijing last year.

## 21. Rising sea levels put Delta at risk

*The Mekong Delta, the country's biggest agricultural hub, might experience a sea level rise of 30cm sooner rather than expected - as early as 2040.*

This is revealed in a World Bank report titled Turn down the heat: Climate extremes, regional impacts and the case for resilience, which was released globally last week.

The report said the rapid rise would mean a loss of about 12 per cent of crop production due to inundation and salinity intrusion. It was projected that rice production could drop by about 2.6 million tonnes per year.

The report said the Mekong Delta and two other Asian river deltas in Asia were particularly at risk because they were less than two metres above sea level.

It said that rising sea levels, more intense tropical cyclones and land subsidence caused by human activities, would disrupt the main economic activities of the delta - agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and tourism.

The Washington-based development bank estimated the cost of adapting shrimp and catfish aquaculture in the Mekong Delta would range from US\$130-190 million per year.

HCM City was also declared to be among coastal cities in Southeast Asia hardest hit by rising seas and increased storm surges. The report claimed that up to 60 per cent of the built-up area could expect rises of up to one metre.

Ajali Acharya, the World Bank Viet Nam's environment cluster leader, said the report provided scientific evidences on which Viet Nam and development partners could help the country move along the low-carbon, climate-resilient, sustainable-development path.

Tran Thuc, director of Viet Nam's Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment, agreed with the World Bank's recommendation that Southeast Asian countries intensify actions to address the impacts of climate change.

He said Viet Nam had made remarkable efforts, with short-term priority going to climate adaptation.

He said much needed to be done in disaster mitigation, flood management and building climate resilience, especially among those poor.

"The core of climate change adaptation is becoming more and more about poverty reduction," he said.

The World Bank is working with Viet Nam on a series of policy actions to mitigate climate change impacts and is discussing programmes in HCM City and in the Mekong Delta to address some of these threats.

## **22. Paddies, houses submerged by flood**

Coastal provinces from Quang Ninh to Khanh Hoa have been bracing over the weekend for storm Bebinca, the second tropical storm of the year.

It made landfall at around 7pm yesterday in the areas of Hai Phong and Thai Binh provinces, nine hours earlier than expected.

Two people were swept away by flash floods in Nghe An Province. Landslides occurred in many mountain communes. In Vinh City, Nghi Loc and Con Cuong Districts, residents had to temporarily leave their homes due to deep floodwaters in many streets.

Nearly 354mm of rain fell on Hon Ngu Island of Nghe An Province. More than 8,000 hectares of rice paddies and 385 lakes and ponds used for raising aquaculture in the province were submerged.

According to the Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control, nearly 20,000 vessels in central provinces moved to safety.

After making landfall, the storm was moving at around 10km per hour. It's expected to become a tropical low pressure within this morning.

About 1,800 residents of Cat Hai town in Hai Phong were relocated last night as the storm had flooded all areas of the town, causing a power blackout. No injuries were reported.

In Quang Ninh Province, according to Nguyen Van Thanh, chairman of the Co To Island District People's Committee, more than 1,000 tourists visiting the island were taken back to the mainland before the storm could hit land.

About 500 tourists volunteered to stay back in the island despite being informed of the weather conditions. All ferry services were stopped at about 2pm on Saturday. According to Thanh, all accommodation services on the island were told to stock up with enough water and food.

Water was flowing over 50m of Quan Lan dyke in Quang Ninh. Hoang Van Thanh, deputy chairman of Van Don People's Committee, said the sea dyke system of Quan Lan was 2,000 metre long, but in some parts the height was low. The district was on high alert throughout the night to monitor the situation.

Thai Binh Province relocated people from nearly 2,300 seaside households yesterday.

Nguyen Van Bai, chairman of the Tien Hai District People's Committee, said the district had notified 2,500 workers in oyster huts near the sea to return home. All residents were forbidden from moving outside the national dyke system.

Twenty metres of dyke in Quat Lam in Giao Thuy District of Nam Dinh collapsed yesterday. Officials quickly and successfully organised repairs.

### **23. Beleaguered Delta farmers sell off land**

*With agriculture remaining generally unprofitable, many farmers in the Mekong Delta are forced to give up farming and sell their lands, causing concern among local authorities.*

Pham Van Dam, who has been a rice farmer for more than 50 years in Hau Giang Province's Chau Thanh A District, said he has not earned any profits in recent years due to the volatility in prices.

This summer-autumn crop has been especially bad with very low yields as well as prices.

He plans to sell all of his 5,000sq.m of paddies located near National Highway 61B and shift to some other business, he said.

He is one of many farmers in the area with such plans.

Nguyen Van Hoa, head of the district's Truong Loi Hamlet, said the price of farmland has plunged from VND90–100 million for 1,000sq.m to VND60-70 million now.

Yet, selling land is not easy since no one wants to buy, he said.

Many shrimp and tra fish farmers also want to sell their lands because business is bad.

Tran Thi Ngoat, a farmer in Can Tho City's Thot Not District, said for the last three years, tra farmers have incurred severe losses after fish prices slumped and costs kept rising.

Thus 60-70 per cent of them have stopped farming and want to sell their land to settle debts, she said.

Again, despite falling prices — at VND100 million per 1,000sq.m, down by half from six years ago – no one wants to buy, she said.

In An Giang and Dong Thap Provinces too, fish farmers are trying in vain to sell their lands.

In Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, and Ca Mau shrimp farmers want to sell off farmland to settle their debts.

Pham Van Quan of Cau Ngang District, Tra Vinh, said the outbreak of shrimp diseases in the last two years has pushed farmers deep into debt.

Authorities in delta provinces have voiced concern about the growing numbers of farmers trying to sell their land.

Hua Sy Hung, People's Committee deputy chairman of Vinh Chau Town in Soc Trang Province, said many local farmers have stopped breeding shrimp and want to sell their lands.

Area under shrimp in Vinh Chau could plummet to 4,000ha as compared to the planned 25,000ha, he feared.

If the problem persisted, the socio-economic situation would be badly affected, he said.

## **24. Floods remain a threat after Typhoon Bebinca**

*People in northern and central provinces have been warned to be vigilant for flash floods and landslides following heavy rain brought by Typhoon Bebinca.*

The National Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting said that while the typhoon had weakened, flood threats were still high.

Some districts saw a great amount of rain on Sunday, with the largest downpours in places such as the northern province of Nam Dinh's Van Ly District with 130mm rainfall, as well as the central province of Nghe An's Con Cuong and Do Luong districts with 209mm and 319mm, respectively.

Two people are missing following floods in Nghe An province.

The typhoon submerged more than 1,300ha of aquaculture ponds and resulted in the loss of a fishing ship and about 2,000ha of oysters in the northern province of Thai Binh.

Supervision on the operation of irrigation systems in the province has been strengthened to prevent more than 3,700ha of rice seeding from being waterlogged.

The northern mountainous province of Yen Bai has moved residents from areas at high risk of land slides, including Yen Bai City, Tran Yen and Yen Binh districts.

Local rescue teams and authorities are on standby to respond quickly to any emergencies.

In the northern province of Ninh Binh, which saw 108-195mm of rain, more than 1,700ha of rice were submerged by yesterday afternoon. Out of 162 spillway dams in the province, 49 were opened.

All 106 fishing ships were safe thanks to good preparation and preventive measures.

The typhoon also caused a loss of VND150 billion (US\$7.1 million) for the northern province of Nam Dinh. There, seawater rose up to 2.5m on Sunday, submerging the Quat Lam tourism area in the province's Giao Thuy District and the Thinh Long tourism area in Hai Hau District and damaging the sluice systems in both areas.

More than 1,500ha of aquaculture land were damaged by flooding and landslides. Across 150ha, many shrimp and fish died due to the environmental shock.

In the northern port city of Hai Phong, the residential area in Nam Village, Phu Long Commune was flooded and completely destroyed. Additionally, a three-tonne ship was wrecked and nearly 100m of embankments and hundreds of metres of dike in Cat Hai District were damaged.

## **25. Brick kilns continue to pollute Ha Noi**

More than 30 brick kilns in Ha Noi's Chuong My District keep operating, polluting the environment and impacting human health and production, even though the city's people's committee asked them to stop operations by the end of last year.

Nguyen Van Them, a resident in the district's Dong Phuong Yen Commune, said that for over 10 years, the kilns had constantly discharged exhaust fumes and trucks loaded with bricks and coal had entered the area every day.

All the owners of traditional brick kilns in the district were asked to dismantle their facilities, but 30 kilns in Dong Phuong Yen Commune failed to obey this order, said deputy chairman of the district people's committee Do Hong Quang.

Nguyen Van Tang, chairman of Dong Phuong Yen Commune's People's Committee, explained the situation by saying that land use contracts signed by kiln owners would not expire until the end of this year.

Moreover, since these owners invested a lot of money in building the kilns, the communal authorities allowed them to delay taking them apart until the end of this year.

The committee submitted a document to the Chuong My District People's Committee to ask for approval for this extension.

Trinh Duy Oai, deputy head of the district's Urban Management Unit, said this proposal was denied because it was unreasonable.

Technically, the district only allowed the commune to use this area for rice planting and breeding. Production for construction materials was only allowed in the area with impoverished soil. Nevertheless, seven households had used 18ha for brick kilns for years.

Quang said that the district had asked the commune to make a plan for ending the kilns' operations. However, the commune had not yet submitted it.

If the commune's authorities did not come up with a plan to remove the kilns by the end of the month, district authorities would do so by next month and punish relevant communal authorities, he said.

## 26. Green projects vital for economy

Financial institutions, banks and financial firms have been urged to support the nation's green growth strategy by providing capital to green projects.

At a workshop yesterday, green finance and banking were asked to get a bigger role because of State budget's limited resources.

Director General of the State Bank of Viet Nam's Department of Organisation and Personnel Nguyen Kim Anh said for emerging countries like Viet Nam, this was actually important.

As defined by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), green finance is the financing of technology, projects, industries or environment-friendly business.

Green banking is the operation of banks in a way which promotes environmental activities and lowers carbon emissions.

However, Deputy Head of the Ministry of Planning and Investment's Central Institute for Economic Management Vu Xuan Nguyet Hong said the two concepts were new to Viet Nam and would be unlikely to assist the implementation of the national strategy launched last year.

"Few solutions relating to green finance and banking are included in the strategy.

"Commercial banks are not ready to offer green finance products or services," she said, blaming the lack of public awareness as "investment for green growth is considered a price to be paid for the environment, not a business opportunity."

Moreover, green projects relating to energy saving and renewable energy usually required huge investment but posed high risk.

Hong said the Government should improve the field's legal framework while considering offering guarantees for green projects.

To ensure a yearly reduction of 85.12 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in nine selected industries - including construction, cement, garment and electricity - Viet Nam needed over US\$30.7 billion, an official from the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MoPI) said.

Head of the MoPI's Department for Science, Education, Natural Resources and Environment Pham Hoang Mai said that more incentives were needed to attract financial resources from domestic and foreign investors.

The Government spends about \$1 billion each year on climate change projects and programmes. In the last 20 years, it has received around \$2 billion in official development assistance for climate change.

Roland Gross, head of the Sector Project on Financial Systems Development of Germany Agency for International Co-operation, said money was not enough to promote green growth and finance.

It was essential to develop capacities for policy makers, public and private banks and enterprises, he said, adding that the lack of consistency, coherence and effectiveness at policy making level could be major obstacles for green finance.

## **27. Hanoi steps up flood prevention efforts**

Hanoi is installing street drainage systems in 20 new flood areas which appeared when tropical storm Bebinca dropped 96mm of rain at the weekend.

Nguyen Le, general director of the Hanoi Water Drainage Company, said the latest flood areas were Pham Van Dong, Linh Nam and Nguyen Xien streets, which were new urban areas that had been developed without proper drainage or sewerage.

In Hanoi, storm water and sewage merge to run through the same drains and pipes.

As a result, Le said, canals and drainages would be built and dredged so they would ensure the fast passage of effluent and storm water to pumping stations.

Meanwhile, company workers would be sent out to flood-prone areas during heavy rain to pump water out of the streets, he said.

These measures have already helped locations such as Thai Ha, Thai Thinh, Ngo Thi Nham, Nguyen Cong Tru or Nguyen Luong Bang streets, which used to be inundated but were kept flood-free in the latest storm.

The area's 300 key pumping stations have a total capacity of 4.1 million cu m of water per hour, coupled with another 300 or so district pumping stations, revealed deputy director of the city's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Ha Duc Chung.

This is enough to deal with heavy rain, he said, adding that careful co-ordination of these pumping stations is necessary to make full use of their capacity.

Nevertheless, pipelines and canals to the Day, Nhue, La Khe and Thiep rivers still need improvement.

## **28. Hydro-power projects dead in the water**

As many as 338 hydro-power projects, which theoretically could generate a combined capacity of over 1,000MW of electricity, would be put off.

The decision has been jointly made by the Ministry of Industry and Trade and provincial authorities across the country.

They also agreed to have another 169 potential projects dropped from consideration.

These moves follow a series of recent inspection carried out by officials from several ministries and the People's Committees of 21 provinces.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the rejected projects were of a low economic benefit and had the potential to impact negatively on the environment and local communities.

Some were also deemed to threaten other economic priority areas, which has led to a lack of interest from investors.

The ministry also suspended work on another 117 projects until 2015. The projects will be continued after that point if they can attract investors and fit in with local socio-economic plans.

Chairman of the Vietnam Energy Association Tran Viet Ngai told the English-language daily Viet Nam News that the association agreed with the ministry's decision because of the negative impacts the plans would have on the local water resources and environment.

In the past, provincial People's Committees were empowered to grant licences for small hydro-power projects even though many of them only had a limited ability to assess the impacts the projects would have on the environment.

Many localities had expected that the proposed hydro-power projects would help them to boost the local industrial growth, he added.

In fact, during the rainy season, the Electricity of Vietnam does not usually buy electricity from small hydro-power plants, which often only have a maximum capacity of 10MW each.

So the rejected projects would not affect future power supplies, he said.

Earlier, Deputy PM Hoang Trung Hai asked for a thorough inspection of every dam in the country that services a hydro-power plant after a 40m breach of the Ia Krel 2 dam in the Central Highlands province of Gia Lai was discovered.

At present, Vietnam has 899 hydro-power projects with a total capacity of 24,880 MW.

These include 260 currently in operation and 211 that are under construction but expected to be operational by 2017.

Another 266 projects are being considered for development.

## 29. Rural families 'left to suffer'

Rural households across the country that have suffered from shocks such as natural disasters and outbreaks of disease haven't received all the support they deserve, according to the findings of a survey that were released June 27.

Carried out by the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development over a six-year period, the survey highlights one of the greatest challenges facing rural households.

About 50 per cent of nearly 3,000 surveyed households said they had suffered at least one natural disaster or epidemic each year, according to Tran Thi Thanh Nhan, an expert from the institute.

Nhan said Viet Nam is among the top 10 countries that are mostly affected by natural disasters. Annual damage, mainly to crops and livestock caused by natural disasters across the country is estimated to make up 1 per cent of GDP, directly affecting 9,000 people.

The poorer they are, the less chances they have for a successful recovery, she said.

Nguyen Do Anh Tuan, director of the institute's Centre of Agricultural Policy (CAP), said rural households have small savings of about VND5-8 million (US\$238-380) per year, making up 10-15 per cent of their total income. So, it is difficult for them to cope with these shocks.

They have to sell all their assets, withdraw their savings and borrow money from relatives and friends, he said.

The country's support policies and programmes don't pay enough attention to helping farmers deal with shocks such as natural disasters. Support from the State meets only 10 per cent of necessary resources for rural households to recover from shocks, said Tuan.

Nhan said insurance, especially agricultural insurance, was not taken out by most rural households, with less than 1 per cent of those surveyed saying they had signed up for insurance.

Nguyen Duy Luong, vice chairman of the Viet Nam Farmers' Association, said farmers are the most vulnerable to shocks caused by natural disasters and epidemics.

Experts said more direct support for rural households was necessary in dealing with natural disasters and health issues.

An early warning system on natural disasters would also help minimise their losses, she said.

In addition, agricultural insurances in co-ordination with community-based funds should be developed, she said.

According to the survey, rural households themselves also find alternative ways to earn their living, instead of focusing exclusively on agricultural production.

The main income of surveyed households in Phu Tho, Nghe An, Quang Nam, Khanh Hoa and Long An provinces was from non-agricultural activities such as trading or transport. Nearly 60 per cent of households saw their incomes increase by more than 20 per cent between 2006-12.

However, according to survey respondents, a lack of capital, market accessibility and labour skills were the main constraints to the development of non-agricultural businesses.

Luong said the survey will be discussed at a meeting of the National Congress of the Viet Nam Farmers' Association next week, which aims to find solutions to improving rural people's lives and agriculture productivity.